
Problems in Democracy

English 1001-045

FYS I | Fall 2023

Dr. Kieran Aarons
Mondays, 8:30am-11:15am
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will approach the art of critical thinking and writing through the study of social and political philosophy. Readings will confront us with a wide range of positions for and against democracy, from Ancient Athens to current-day social movements. Our focus will be on recognizing and assessing their core arguments, discussing them critically together, and translating our conclusions into persuasive academic-level essay writing. Is genuine democracy an impossible ideal, only suited to Gods? Can the state express the will of the people through the constitution, the vote, and other procedures of public discourse, or is democracy best conceived as an anarchic force that challenges all institutional authority? Are “the people” the sum of individuals, a common power, or a potentially-criminal mob? Taking a stance on such debates will allow us to refine the skills essential to good essay-writing: not only summary, analysis, citation, organization, and logical flow, but also suspense, effective use of stories and examples, and mystery. These skills form the necessary foundations for FYS II and upper-level Liberal Arts classes. Students can expect to produce 15-20 pages of scaffolded, revisable, formal writing that includes two essays as well as preparatory homework assignments and in-class writings. In-class workshopping of student papers should also be expected.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

FYS students will learn to embrace the writing process and establish writerly habits, while developing guided critical reading, thinking, and writing skills necessary for their success in upper-level course work. Students learn to collaborate and to take their work, and the work of their peers seriously, thereby establishing best practices of critique.

FYS I students learn to:

- formulate inquiries emerging from readings of texts
- analyze and synthesize multiple texts and cite evidence
- construct a claim and an argument
- practice the writerly process (i.e. revision, reflection, and peer review)

REQUIRED TEXTS

All reading assignments will be available in .pdf format on Canvas. In order to minimize the presence of screens in the classroom, I ask that you please print out all PDF/HTML reading assignments, take notes on the printed-out version, and bring these with you to class.

CLASS SCHEDULE (all readings are to be completed *before* the date listed next to them)

The Uses of Democracy

9/11 ***Reading assignment:***

Listen to the audio interview with Gabriel Rockhill on “The Use of Democracy” (available on Canvas).

Writing assignment: podcast review

In ~1 full page (typed, double-spaced, 12 point font), using full sentences and good grammar, answer at least three of the following four questions. For this assignment, imagine you are writing a “report” on its contents for a third party website.

1. Explain how, according to Rockhill, democracy is "a value concept"? Can you think of any exceptions to this valorization of democracy which Rockhill calls “democratophilia”?
2. What does Rockhill mean by "the democratic double-standard"?
3. What is the analogy Rockhill claims to exist between 20th and 21st century democracy and 19th century colonialism?
4. Why does Rockhill claim that "democracy as such does not exist"? How do the examples of ancient Greece and the U.S. allegedly show this to be true?

Due 9/11, at the start of class. Please print it out and bring it with you to class.

This activity will provide you with practice in aural comprehension and communicating that comprehension in an accurate and precise summary of the issues in your own words.

Hatred of Democracy: Ancient Philosophers against Democracy

9/18 ***Reading assignment:***

Plato, *Republic*, Book VIII

Hotspot exercise: Please locate one or two hotspots in our reading from this week, and come to class prepared to explain why they are interesting, suggestive, or provocative.

This exercise helps develop the skills of close reading, identification of argumentation, summary, and analysis.

9/25

Readings:

Sullivan, "America Has Never Been So Ripe for Tyranny”;

Arruza, “From Democracy to Tyranny: Plato, Trump, and the Misuses of a Philosophical Trope”

Discussion Post #1 | *Due at the start of class, via Canvas.*

- (a) Explain at least one objection that Plato raises against democracy, citing a quote from the primary text that supports your explanation.
- (b) Sullivan and Arruza have diametrically opposed interpretations of how Plato’s critique of democracy applies to American culture in the years surrounding Donald Trump’s

presidency. Whose position do you find more convincing? Do we suffer from an excess of democracy, or not enough? Explain your position.

Reply to Discussion post questions of two classmates by 10/1 at 10pm.

This activity will provide you with practice in reading comprehension and the communication of that comprehension clearly and coherently in your own words, making use of appropriate textual support.

Modern Philosophers for Democracy: Republican and Liberal Models

10/02 Reading:

Rousseau, *Social Contract* Book I, Book II (Ch. 1-7)

Framing questions for our in-class discussion:

How, for Rousseau, can government be considered legitimate? What is the aim and function of a social contract, in his view? How much liberty must individuals give up, when they create new laws together? Is Rousseau's conception of the social contract totalitarian? If 'the people' are the only rightful sovereign, who is this "lawgiver" who makes the law, and these "magistrates" who execute it? Why can't you and I just exercise our will on our own? What is Rousseau's concern about direct democracy? What sort of system does he recommend instead? Are there moments in which Rousseau's republican theory of democracy that are undemocratic?

10/9 Reading:

-Rousseau, *Social Contract* Book III (Ch. 1-5)

-Film: *Walking Towards Autonomy* [[YouTube](#)]

-"Rebellion, Autonomy, And Communal Self-Government In The Indigenous Municipality Of Cherán, Michoacán" [[Link](#)]

Writing Assignment:

Consider the following claim: "*The political experiment of democracy taking place in Cherán offers an example of Rousseauian republicanism.*"

Write 1-2 pages in which you take a strong position either *for* or *against* this claim (either defend it or refute it), citing examples from Rousseau, *Walking Towards Autonomy*, and the podcast assigned for this week. Defend your thesis with the strongest arguments you are able to mobilize. Ask yourself: what are the key markers of Rousseauian social contracts, and in what sense do we see them operative (or not) in the case of Cherán?

For this exercise, your paper need not include any introduction and conclusion; rather, cut directly to your core argument. However, please ensure that you cite all your sources correctly, following the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

Print this assignment out and bring it with you to class 10/9.

This writing activity practices the art of philosophical argumentation, incorporating the mobilization of textual evidence and proper citation practices.

10/16 Readings:
-Mill, *On Liberty* (Ch. 1)

Discussion questions:

1. What is Mill's critique of Rousseau in *On Liberty*, and do you think it is fair to him? Why must we distinguish the "government" from the "people," according to Mill? Is public opinion a positive force of liberty, or a source of domination? Does Mill believe in a "common good"? If not, what is the principle of government (i.e., in the name of what does it legitimate itself)? When, for Mill, is it legitimate for the government to infringe on individual liberties?

Our reading for this week will be Chapter 1 of Mill's *On Liberty*, where he offers a rejection of Rousseauian "communitarianism," and a defense of a liberal conception of negative freedom.

Discussion Post due by the beginning of class on 10/16. Reply to at least one of your classmates' questions by Sunday, 10/22 10pm.

Deliberative Democracy and Beyond

10/23 Note: class will start at 930am today

Readings:

-Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy"
-Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy"

Discussion questions:

1. Habermas' essay is titled "Three Normative Models of Democracy" because he lays out three different norms, standards or ideals for democratic politics. The idea of a deliberative public sphere is supposed to offer a compromise between the failings of republicanism and those of liberalism. Is the idea of a public sphere even possible today? Do inequalities prevent the broad involvement of people in public discourse? Could people in the US ever really practice deliberative democracy?
2. As Cohen tries to show, many of the issues we might assume would make rational discussion impossible can actually be overcome through the use of correct 'procedures'. For instance, what happens if consensus on the common good is impossible? How do deliberative democrats attempt to resolve this problem? Do you see problems with this account?

Forum post: raise one objection to Habermas or Cohen's account of deliberative democracy. Please reply to at least one of your peers' objections by Sunday 10/29 at 10pm.

This activity will provide you with practice in formulating, deliberating about, and providing solutions to critical problems raised for the theories we read, or, as Kant would put it, "to think in the position of everyone else." It also gives you an opportunity to identify and provide original and thoughtful replies to counter-arguments.

10/30 Reading:
Young, "Communication & the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy"

Discussion questions:

Do you think greeting, rhetoric and storytelling are, as Young argues, critical to democracy, or are they potentially problematic? Are there other modes of communication that you think should be included in democratic discussion and decision-making? Do you agree that difference is a resource for democracy? Does Young successfully provide a third way between the liberal (or what she calls interest-based and aggregate) model for deciding what the common good of society is?

Writing Assignment:

In 1 page, typed-out, come up with your own example of an undervalued form of political speech or political communication, in accordance with Young's discussion. Why is such communication hard to account for within the paradigm of 'deliberative democracy'? Why is it important, nonetheless? Submit via Canvas by 1pm, and print and bring with you to class *In your essays you are expected to provide relevant and original examples, in addition to indicating the concepts or issues these examples highlight. This activity will help you develop and think through meaningful, real-world examples of theoretical concepts.*

In addition to questions or critical comments about Young's version of deliberative democracy, which she calls "communicative democracy," be prepared to discuss some of the following questions in small groups: *Do you think greeting, rhetoric and storytelling are, as Young argues, critical to democracy, or are they potentially problematic? Are there other modes of communication that you think should be included in democratic discussion and decision-making?*

11/6 *Peer Essay Exchange:*

Complete draft of midterm essay due by the start of class

Final Draft of Midterm Paper due 11/12, 10pm via Canvas.

Radical Theories of Democracy: Politics on the Lam

11/13 *Readings:*

Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy"; *Politics and Vision*, Ch. 17 (selections)

Discussion Post:

Wolin claims – quite polemically – that we live in a regime he calls 'Superpower', which is a form of 'inverted totalitarianism', as exemplified in the endless war and economic accumulation of our times. Do you agree? At the same time, he seeks to push for a more original conception of democracy, one which has been undermined by the institution of the nation state and the economic institutions of civil society. How does Wolin propose to renew the practice and concept of democracy, given his critiques of 'constitutionalism'? How does he define revolution? What criticisms, if any, do you have of this model?

Please end your Discussion post with two questions; Reply to the questions of one other student by Sunday, 10pm.

In addition to questions and critical comments about Wolin's analysis of democracy, please come to class prepared to provide at least two contemporary examples: one that you believe

depicts the privatization, deregulation, and austerity that characterize Superpower, and another that might qualify as what Wolin calls “fugitive democracy.”

11/20 Reading:

Crimethinc, “From Democracy to Freedom.” [[Online](#) | [Purchase](#)]

Questions for discussion:

Does Crimethinc cogently demonstrate that democracy (whether representative or direct) is an undesirable political ideal, and that anarchism should replace it?

11/27 Readings:

Rancière, “Democracy, Republic, Representation”

Questions for discussion:

What does Rancière mean when he says that “There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as democratic government”? Why does Rancière claim democracy is opposed to all representative forms of political governance? Do you agree with his claims about ‘oligarchy’? Is ‘representative democracy’ an oxymoron?

Suggested reading: [Interview with Rancière](#)

This late 2019 interview with Rancière is a helpful clarification of the chapter we read and, unlike the essay, is full of examples. (*Note:* when talking about “republican discourse,” Rancière is referring to the communitarian version of republicanism, which has, as he says here, spread in racist and xenophobic forms throughout the 21st century.)

Radical Theories of Democracy: The Power of the Multitude

12/4 In-person meeting

Readings:

Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* Ch. 3.1 “The Long March of Democracy”; Ch. 3.3 “Democracy of the Multitude”

Also, listen to this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1unYWrec62U&t=2s>

Recommended video: Hardt, “[Assembly](#)”

Writing Assignment:

In 350 words or more, please answer the following questions:

Hardt and Negri argue that democracy should be understood as the social organization of the ‘multitude,’ which they see as the expression of a ‘constituent power’ that both underwrites, and also exceeds, the forms of political and economic domination (‘Empire’) under which we live today. They advocate a non-representational, non-sovereign, and global concept of democracy. Yet their reasons differ, in important ways, from Wolin and Rancière. What similarities and differences do you notice? Which account do you find more appealing, and why? Do you think it is possible for the multitude to “institute” its power, as they suggest in the final sections of our reading, without re-creating the failings of representation and sovereignty that the authors strive to resist? Why, or why not?

Post your reply to our Canvas Discussion Board by the start of class.

**Between the Multitude and Revolt:
Democratic Tactics and Technology in Contemporary Social Movements**

12/11 *Readings:*

- Film: PBS, “The Battle for Hong Kong” ([online](#))
- The Vitalist International, “Summer in Smoke” [[Online](#) | [Print](#)] (*A podcast interview with the authors is also available [here](#), for those interested*)
- Chuang, “Welcome to the Frontlines.” [[Online](#) | [Print PDF](#)]

Discussion Board post: *Hotspot exercise* —Please locate a hotspot in one of our readings from this week, and explain why it's interesting, suggestive, or provocative. End your post with two questions to the text. Answer the questions of at least one other classmate by Sunday at 10pm.

In-class final paper workshop

12/18 *Peer Essay Exchange:*

Complete rough draft of final essay due at the start of class

Final paper due 12/21 at 10pm, via Canvas

ATTENDANCE

Each SAIC course, whether held online or in-person, or a hybrid of both, is a learning community that relies on regular, active engagement from all participants. Other than in-person activities which are missed due to illness, all students are expected to fully participate in each of their courses, including in-person classes, synchronous online sessions, and regular, independent work and study. Ultimately, faculty will give credit to students enrolled in a course only if they have responded adequately to the standards and requirements of the course overall. The full SAIC Engagement, Participation, and Attendance Policy can be found in the 2023/2024 Student Handbook, on page 76. All students should review and be familiar with this important policy, as well as how it will be applied in this particular course.

If you miss three or more classes, whether or not for a reasonable cause, you will fail this class, if you do not withdraw. The deadline for withdrawal is Oct 31, 2023.

REQUIREMENTS

You must complete and submit all work by the final day of class (12/18) and achieve an overall course grade of 70% or higher to receive CREDIT for this course. If you have a 69% average (or lower), you will receive NO CREDIT for this course and will have to repeat it. Completing assignments does not guarantee credit for the course. To get credit for this course, you need to earn at least a 70% average on all work and adhere to the attendance and preparation and participation policies. Students need to keep track of their own grades.

Discussion posts and other writing exercises comprise 25% of your grade. Throughout the course, you will be required to complete short writing assignments that respond to our readings, and train different aspects of the writing process (e.g. overviews, body text, comparisons,

rhetoric, argumentation, etc.). Some of these will be “Discussion” posts completed on Canvas. These should be roughly ~500 words, and should be written in full sentences with good grammar. When posting to Canvas discussions, you will need to conclude your post with two questions of your own on the upcoming week’s reading. These questions should be as focused as possible, making reference to specific passages or concepts in the reading that either interest or confuse you. On weeks where there are Discussion posts, you are also responsible for providing at least two answers to questions by your classmates by 10pm on Sunday of each week. To receive credit for the week, you must complete *both* parts of the assignment.

Your midterm essay comprises 35% of your grade. A full draft of your 5-6 page paper is due in class on 11/6 and a revised draft is due via Canvas on 11/12 by 10pm. A portion of this grade includes participation in an in-class peer review workshop, as well as the revision of your work before submitting the final version.

Your final research paper comprises 40% of your grade. A 6-7 page paper is due in class on 12/18, and a revised draft is due via Canvas on 12/21, 10pm. A portion of this grade includes participation in a peer review session, as well as the revision of your work before submitting the final version.

No late papers will be accepted without prior approval by the instructor.

CITATIONS & FORMATTING

Any source you consult and that informs your ideas or your language (including course texts) must be cited using both in-text footnotes, and a “Works Cited” page. Both must be formatted according to Chicago Manual of Style standards. For citation standards, see here: https://www.chicomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

Unless I’ve indicated otherwise, all the work you turn in to me must:

- be type-written, in 12-point *Times New Roman* font;
- have 1” margins all around;
- be double-spaced;
- include a *single-spaced* heading in the upper left-hand corner of page one with your name, my name, the course title and section, and the date;
- include a title;
- have your last name and a page number in the upper right hand corner of each page
- if submitted electronically, be titled as follows: Last Name_Assignment (e.g., Aarons_Essay 1 Rough Draft).

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT POLICY

Academic misconduct includes both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of: the submission of the work of another as one’s own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources. Academic misconduct also includes the falsification of academic or student-related records, such as transcripts, evaluations and letters of recommendation. Academic misconduct extends to all spaces on campus, including satellite

locations and online education. Academic integrity is expected in all coursework, including online learning. It is assumed that the person receiving the credit for the course is the person completing the work. SAIC has processes in place, including LDAP authentication, to verify student identity.

POLICY ON AI-ASSISTED CONTENT GENERATION TOOLS

In this course, the submission of any AI-generated work is strictly prohibited without advance, written permission from the instructor. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with their instructor if they are interested in utilizing AI tools (apps, etc.) to develop content they plan to submit for a course assignment. If students are not sure if a tool they plan to use is considered AI-facilitated, they are encouraged to ask their instructor.

Submitting AI-generated content without receiving permission from the instructor to do so will be considered a violation of community rules for this course and may constitute a violation of the School's Academic Misconduct Policy.

ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

SAIC is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with known or suspected disabilities, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition who think they would benefit from assistance or accommodations should first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule a virtual appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you and your instructors with a letter outlining the approved accommodations via email. You must request accommodations for each course before any accommodations will be implemented. You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible. The DLRC can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278 or email at dlrc@saic.edu.

STUDENT SUPPORT

The Office of Students Affairs at SAIC is here to support all students with resources to aid in their success inside and outside of the classroom. If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing food everyday, and/or do not have a safe and stable place to live, please contact the Office of Student Affairs - (312) 629-6800; studenthelp@saic.edu during business hours. If you contact them after hours, someone will respond the next business day.

The SAIC Wellness Center, which includes Counseling Services, Health Services and the Disability and Learning Resource Center, is also here to support students' mental health, health and accessibility needs. You may contact them at:

- Counseling Services: counselingservices@saic.edu and 312-499-4271 (press 1 to speak to a counselor after hours)
- Health Services: healthservices@saic.edu and 312-499-4288/877.924.7758
- Disability and Learning Resource Center: dlrc@saic.edu and 312-499-4278

In case of an emergency, please contact SAIC Campus Security, 24 hours a day, by visiting any campus security desk or calling 312.899.1230.

WRITING CENTER INFORMATION

Tutors are available in person and online to help students achieve their writing goals at any stage of their writing process. All students are welcome, and they can work on essays, artist statements, application materials, presentation texts, theses, proposals, creative writing, or social media posts. The Writing Center tutors are kind, encouraging, and interested!

The Writing Center is located at 116 S. Michigan Ave., 10th Floor, and can be reached at 312-499-4138 or by email at wcenter@saic.edu. Its hours (CST) are Mon–Thurs: 9am-7pm; Fri: 9am-5pm. Though drop-ins are welcome, the best way to guarantee an appointment is to schedule one via [Navigate](#).

OFFICE HOURS

I will be available for Zoom office hours. Please just email me or talk to me before or after class to schedule a time slot.